




Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**

**MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 February 2016

### **MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL**

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (5.54 pm), in reply: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the members of the House for their contributions to the debate on the bill. Many of them have been very passionate and have recognised the richness that multiculturalism brings to their various communities. In particular I thank the member for Algester for her contribution, and I want to read out the first paragraph to which she referred in her speech. The charter states—

The Parliament—

- honours the Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Australians whose lands, winds and waters we all now share, and their ancient and enduring cultures ...

I think it is important to put on the record that that is the first paragraph of the charter. I also want to sincerely thank the previous minister for multicultural affairs and member for Waterford, Shannon Fentiman, for her hard work in the preparation of this bill. She did an excellent job in the development phase, and I look forward to working equally as hard on the implementation phase of the act.


The Multicultural Recognition Bill has three main purposes: to recognise the contribution of diverse groups to the Queensland community; to promote Queensland as a unified, harmonious and inclusive community; and to ensure that government services are responsive to our state's diversity. These purposes will be achieved by establishing the Multicultural Queensland Charter—I just read the first paragraph—and the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council; requiring a multicultural policy and action plan to be developed; requiring government employees to be made aware of the charter, policy and action plan; and establishing reporting obligations for government entities.

I would like to address some of the issues raised by members during the debate of the bill. The member for Mount Ommaney asked me to clarify how the members of the advisory council will be appointed, and I am happy to do so. Clause 10 of the bill provides that the advisory council will consist of the minister and 11 other members. This clause also provides that, in making appointments to the individual advisory council, the minister must have regard to the need of the council to be representative of diverse groups, including people from regional locations.

In order to get as diverse a field of nominations for membership of the advisory council as possible, there will be a public call for nominations once the bill is passed. I want the advisory council to have access to as wide a range of knowledge and experience as possible as well as community networks, which I think is important. Clear selection criteria outlining the skills and expertise required will be included to provide fairness and to ensure that the council is as representative of the diverse groups of people in Queensland as possible. I think I remember someone saying that it is not going to be an easy feat, but we will certainly try our best. I have no doubt that a number of outstanding candidates will emerge from this accountable, open and transparent process.

The member for Mount Ommaney also asked how this bill will contribute to economic and employment opportunities for migrants and refugees. Employment is a significant contributor to the full participation of all Queenslanders and benefits the individual as well as the state.

As mentioned in the debate, newly arrived migrants in particular are often disadvantaged in participating in the economy. Evidence suggests that newly arrived migrants have some of the highest rates of unemployment. There are many reasons new arrivals face barriers to gaining employment including a lack of Australian based work experience, overseas qualifications not being recognised, limited education and/or English skills and in some cases discrimination. Principle 6 of the Multicultural Queensland Charter recognises that the creation of opportunities that encourage the full participation of people from diverse backgrounds in the cultural, economic, political and social life of Queensland helps to build a prosperous state.

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (7.42 pm), continuing in reply: Promotion of the charter within government and across the community has the potential to enhance employment opportunities for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The development of the multicultural policy and action plan is another opportunity for the Queensland government to prioritise this issue and create more employment opportunities. For example, during the development of the multicultural action plan, consideration will be given to what actions can be taken across government that will assist with workforce participation. The Queensland government is already leading by example in creating employment opportunities for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For example, recently the government committed to a jobs target of supporting 400 migrants and refugees to achieve employment outcomes during 2015-16. As I mentioned in my second reading speech, the Queensland government is a proud champion and supporter of the MDA Inc's Work and Welcome 500 initiative, which involves individuals and businesses supporting refugees into work placements. The goal for the Queensland public sector Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2015-2020 is to build a workforce and workplaces that better reflect the diverse community we live in. The Queensland government is embracing inclusion and diversity, not just because it is the right thing to do but also because it makes business sense.

The member for Mount Ommaney also asked how the implementation of the bill will be measured. As the member mentioned, under clause 21 of the bill the minister must table a report about the multicultural policy in the Legislative Assembly at least every three years, and that is about the policy. This is not just a requirement for an update to be provided; the report must outline the progress of achieving the multicultural policy outcomes, as well as provide an update on the implementation of the actions in the multicultural action plan by government entities. The timing of this report provides adequate time for actions to be implemented so that improved outcomes can be effectively measured. Under clause 24 of the bill, the government entities responsible for actions in the multicultural action plan must also report a summary of their progress. The information must be made publicly available as soon as practicable after the end of each financial year, such as by publication on a government website. We are hoping to get an update of outcomes coming from those entities at least at the end of each financial year to give them time to implement them. There is more reporting required than just the change to the action plan. The reporting requirements of the bill will strengthen the implementation of the multicultural policy across government through the monitoring of the progress of outcomes. This will ensure that the government achieves positive change for the community by identifying where government intervention is needed or where investment can be realigned and services improved.

The member for Noosa talked about clause 6 the bill and whether the bill is legally enforceable. While clause 6 of the bill provides that it does not create new rights or impose legally enforceable obligations, government entities will be required to comply with the principles of the bill, including the reporting requirements. Legislation can send strong symbolic messages to reflect community values and expectations. Legislation also has a significant educational benefit in that newcomers and citizens can see the values that Queenslanders hold. Queensland has always drawn strength from the rich cultures and traditions of people from diverse backgrounds. Multiculturalism is at the heart of who we are. It is why we will continue to make sure that new ideas and new people are always welcome in Queensland. Multiculturalism benefits our economy, productivity, workforce and regional development. The passage of the multicultural legislation will clearly demonstrate this parliament's commitment to ensuring that all Queenslanders, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, live in communities that are inclusive, safe and prosperous. Having multicultural legislation demonstrates the Queensland government's commitment to equitable access to services and opportunity for those from diverse backgrounds. It will provide a robust instrument to strengthen multicultural policies and services across government.

The Multicultural Queensland Charter, one of the key components of the bill, outlines inclusive principles that will underpin government policy and encourage their adoption in businesses and initiatives across the community. The multicultural policy, another component of the bill, will provide clear direction to state government departments to address service delivery issues for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Legislation that promotes and values the contributions of the many migrants and refugees who have settled in Queensland will greatly benefit our inclusive, open and welcoming state. The Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council will consult with other groups or bodies as requested by the minister and provide advice and recommendations to the minister. Once established, the advisory council will work collaboratively with the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services to develop a plan for engagement and consultation with Queenslanders about multicultural issues. During the development of this plan, mechanisms will be put in place to ensure coverage of a diverse range of communities and groups, including those in regional and rural areas. The advisory council's functions are outlined in clause 9 of the bill. The advisory council is not a decision-making body. Rather, its role will be to provide recommendations and advice to the minister, and I am very keen to receive those recommendations and advice.

The advisory council's functions have been developed to enable flexibility in the range of advice that the council may provide. They are flexible to provide whatever they believe is important for consideration. It is likely the advisory council's advice may be about how to address the needs, aspirations and contributions of people from diverse backgrounds and raise awareness of the Multicultural Queensland Charter within the community.

The advisory council would also likely provide advice on the development and implementation of government policies about multiculturalism and the delivery of services and programs funded by government that consider the needs of people from diverse backgrounds. I am looking forward to hearing some innovative programs and advice.

Mr Deputy Speaker Elmes, you asked why the bill provides that the advisory council meet twice a year. In fact, the bill provides that the advisory council must meet at least twice a year. It is up to the council to decide how often they meet. If they determine that they want to meet every six weeks or eight weeks or whatever suits their busy schedules, as minister I am more than willing to accommodate their requirements. The bill says that they must meet at least twice a year. It is not just twice a year. I am happy to accommodate much more frequent meeting times if that is what they wish to do.

The current requirement is flexible to allow for the council to meet more regularly if required, such as to address emerging issues. If something comes up and they really feel that they need to meet, they can also ask for an urgent meeting or something like that. The advisory council will comprise a group of eminent Queenslanders who will be able to represent and engage directly with diverse communities to provide a unique perspective on issues facing people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you also stated that in your view there was little stakeholder support for multicultural legislation. When the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, through Multicultural Affairs Queensland, conducted seven community forums across the state in August 2015 it found strong support for the Multicultural Recognition Bill and the Multicultural Queensland Charter as well as the strong reporting obligations in the bill. The members of the Interim Multicultural Community Reference Group, which was established by my colleague the previous minister for multicultural affairs, were also strongly supportive of the bill. In addition, 20 of the 21 public submissions to the Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee were strongly supportive of the legislation.

In conclusion, this bill helps to ensure that Queensland government policies, programs and services recognise and respond to Queensland's growing multicultural population and address wideranging issues including economic participation, sense of belonging and community cohesion. The bill helps to support substantial outcomes for Queensland, allowing the state to position itself for opportunities in the anticipated tourism boom of the coming years—and I notice the Minister for Tourism is in the House—as well as overseas investment and trade links with our trading partners around the world. I am sure the minister is happy to welcome international tourists to Queensland. The bill will add to Queensland's outstanding reputation as a friendly, welcoming and safe place to live, visit and do business.

I would like to thank and pay tribute to the Interim Multicultural Community Reference Group, which provided invaluable advice during the development of the bill. The members of the interim reference group are: Dr Nora Amath, Mr Ali Kadri, Mr Elijah Buol, Professor Prasad Yarlagadda, Ms Josephine Aufai, Ms Gitie House, Ms Helga Biro, Ms Kerrin Benson, Mr Serge Voloschenko,

Dr Cuong Bui, Dr Homa Forotan, Ms Cecilia Barassi-Rubio. I also thank Sergeant Jim Bellos for attending the meetings of the group. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of community stakeholders who participated in the consultation forums held across the state in August last year. I would also like to thank the 21 organisations and individuals who took the time to make a submission to the committee to assist in its consideration of the bill.

Finally, I would like to thank the committee members for their consideration of the bill. Together, the new legislation, charter and advisory council will be key to our continuing efforts to build and sustain a fair and equal society through a strong focus on harmony, unity and inclusion. I am very proud that my first bill to be moved and debate in the House is the Multicultural Recognition Bill. I commend the bill to the House.